

Constantine and Michael the Archangel. Christian origins of Constantinople.

In my paper today I want to look at the foundation of Constantinople, which took place on 8th November 324. There is little written about this subject and for a long time scientific debate has revolved around a few issues, virtually none of them moving the discussion forward. Historians generally only say one thing: that the act of foundation proceeded according to the rite of *limitatio*, or the ritual demarking of the boundaries of the city. The best (and for the most part the only) source used when discussing the course of this act is the account of Philostorgius, the Arian historian of the church in the first quarter of the fifth century, known in the ninth century abridged version of Patriarch Photios. However, as it turns out, one only needs to consult other evidence to see that on this seemingly well-researched subject, there is still quite a lot to say.

My paper will be based on the evidence coming from the time of Constantine, as well as on sources from much later epochs. As I will however try to show, at least part of their symbolism related to the founding of the city is not only a secondary, concocted tradition, but originates directly from the events of 324 and reflects the significance attributed to the foundation of Constantinople by Constantine himself. The main character in my paper will be – of course aside from Constantine – the Archangel Michael. It was around his figure – which as I will show, was very specifically conceived – that the pronounced ideological focus of the foundation of Constantinople appeared. The interpretation that I want to put forward to you can be compared to a mosaic: a clear picture can be revealed from the pattern of individual stones. Some of them sit in the image rather firmly, others less so – I am however convinced, that even removing some of them will not violate the whole picture.

The paper will consist of four parts. First, I will try to demonstrate, that the figure of Michael is omnipresent in the evidence connected to the foundation. Secondly, I will discuss the role Michael played in the early Christian thought and in Constantine's ideology. I will then move to the Michael tradition we find in Hagia Sophia and finally I will show, that already in times before the foundation of Constantinople the Archangel Michael was present in the way Christians conceived the imperial power.

Let's look briefly at the known political context of the foundation. Constantine together with his son Crispus has just defeated the last of his political rivals, Licinius. The decisive battle took place at Adrianople (3rd July 324) and in a naval battle in the Hellespont and Chrysopolis (18th

August 324). During the course of the war Constantine besieged Byzantium, where the army of Licinius sought refuge. Both geographically and temporally, the foundation of the new city is obviously connected to these victories: it occurred almost immediately after them, and the place chosen by Constantine had played an important role in the campaign. It did not escape the attention of the researchers that Constantine did not try to link his victory of Licinius to any pagan cult (Peter Brown suggests that as such it was evidence of the progressive Christianization of the empire). As I will try to demonstrate, however, there exist clear signs binding the victory to the Christian cult.

We shall begin with a reference from *Vita Constantini*: according to Eusebius, Constantine commissioned in front of his Roman palace a great painting, depicting him with his sons. Above the head of Constantine is a cross, and at his feet, in the depths of water, lies a dragon, which has been pierced by an arrow. The context of this information, placed in the work of Eusebius between the victory over Licinius (August 324) and the Council of Nice (May 325), and the fact that the painting depicts his two sons, indicates that the image was to commemorate the victory of Constantine over Licinius. Licinius as a dragon appears in a few other places: coins minted by Constantine after around 326 depict on the reverse a snake/dragon pierced with a lance with the symbol of the chi-ro at the top¹. Constantine himself, in a letter quoted by Eusebius, called Licinius a „dragon” (δράκων), defeated by God. Eusebius finally specified Licinius in one more place as a „snake” (ὄφις), and relating his actions underlines that he was opposed to the church, was a persecutor of Christians, and that he believed in spells and magic. We can therefore conclude, that in the post-battle propaganda Constantine presented his triumph over Licinius as the slaying of a monster-dragon which threatened the church.

This image refers us to the Bible. Eusebius cites in his texts „prophesies in the books of the prophets of God”² which were fulfilled thanks to the victories of Constantine. These have to be a passage from the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 27, 1), which moreover, Eusebius then quotes, and the Apocalypse of St. John (Rev 12, 7 – 10 and Rev 19, 11 – 20, 6), which was often present in the imagination of the Christian authors of the early fourth century. The message contained in the Apocalypse gives concrete form to the image of conflict between God and a dragon/sea-monster, present in many other places of the Bible: the dragon slayer is the Archangel Michael. Since Licinius was in the vision of incidents the dragon, it is easy to hypothesize, that Constantine represented the holy Saint Michael. Also the presentation of the triumph in the painting as described in *Vita Constantini* vividly recalls the later iconography of St Michael defeating the dragon, even if the ocean

¹ <http://www.constantinethegreatcoins.com/symbols/spes.jpeg>

² *Vita Constantini* III,3.

depicted here have more to do with the naval battle of the Hellespont (and the prophecy of Isaiah) than the text of the Apocalypse, on which the later iconography is based.

We also hear of St. Michael in the context of Constantine's battle as St Michael from later sources. Take the church of St Michael in Sosthenion, close to the capital, which the chronicler from the first half of the sixth century John Malalas tells us about. Describing the journey of the Argonauts in the region of the Bosphorus, Malalas reports of their clash with the local leader Amykos. The Argonauts were precisely in Sosthenion (which means „place of shelter“) when there appeared to them a ghost „a massive man with wings on his arms like an eagle“³, foretelling their victory in battle. The Argonauts duly defeated Amykos, then erected the temple in Sosthenion. Many years later Constantine the Great visited the temple: he saw there an image of „an angel in the clothing of a monk of the Christian faith“⁴ and wanted to know the name of the apparition. He fell asleep in the temple, and in his dream he heard that the ghost was St Michael. On the site of the temple he accordingly founded a church dedicated to St Michael.

The comparatively late testimony of Malalas is placed by many researchers alongside the message of Sozomenos, who shortly before 450 attests in an extensive fragment of his *History of the Church* to the existence beneath Constantinople of a church referred to by him as Michealion. Sozomenos attributes the construction of the church to Constantine the Great and mentions the context of the founding of the city. *The Life of St Daniel the Stylite*, created around 455 relates, that Daniel set his column close to Constantinople, at an abandoned pagan temple, at some distance from the functioning shrine of St Michael. The problem is that both of these testimonies refer to the village of Anaplous, which was located a little closer to Constantinople than Sosthenion. The majority of researchers are of the opinion, therefore, that on the same European coast of the Bosphorus there operated near each other two large early centres of the cult of St Michael. It is difficult to resolve the matter clearly, but if Sosthenion and Anaplous were in fact separate shrines, our attention is attracted rather more towards the former.

Malalas shows, that the shrine in Sosthenion combined several legendary motifs: the angel (Michael) is granting assistance in battle, Constantine the Great experiences a revelation and builds the church of St Michael. Although in the early communications these themes do not come together even once in this configuration, we can – for now tentatively – suppose that Sosthenion could have been the place in which the Archangel Michael predicted to Constantine the victory of Licinius, and the sources which we know of are an echo of the story of this event. It should be noted that the account of Malalas is somehow „asymetric“: Michael predicts victory for the Argonauts, and we would have expected him to foretell also for Constantine, but he occurs only as an interpreter of the

³ Malalas, *Chronographia* 4,13. δύναμις ἀνδρός φοβεροῦ φέροντος τοῖς ὤμοις πτέρυγας ὡς ἀετοῦ.

⁴ Ibidem. ἀγγέλου σημεῖον σχήματα μονάχου.

ancient apparition. The fourteenth century author Nikephoros Kallistos writes very interestingly about Constantine's apparition of Michael, repeating word for word the account of Malalas, developing however the dream scene of Constantine in the temple. According to Nikephoros, the emperor was there after the battle of Chrysopolis when the Archangel revealed himself, telling him that it was owing to the Archangel's help that the emperor gained victory over the tyrant.

Both themes (the triumph over the dragon-Licinius and the vision of Sosthenion) find their conclusion on the day Constantinople was founded. This date was reconstructed by historians based on indirect information. We know from Themistios, that on the day of the foundation of the city Constantine had elevated to the rank of emperor his son Constantius. The date of the elevation is conferred through four sources and it took place six days before the Ides of November, that is 8th November. That is why 8th November 324 is generally considered to be the date of the foundation of Constantinople.

8th November was in the eastern tradition and is to this day the most important holiday of St Michael the Archangel (and in the later period – of all *asomatoi*), noted by numerous calendars. This holiday was part of the so-called abridged holiday calendar of the Constantinople church, which included the most important holidays of the liturgical year. The creation of the calendar is dated to the end of the seventh century, however the holidays which it celebrates have a much longer tradition. These are holidays linked to Christ, Virgin Mary, the remembrance of certain apostles and a few other saints, none of whom live later than the turn of the fourth and fifth century. I do not claim, that it was personally Constantine who stood behind the creation of the liturgical remembrance of St Michael. If however the emperor was convinced that he conquered Licinius thanks to the help of Michael (or maybe even as Michael?), then undoubtedly it is to this figure that he devoted his newly created city. 8th November was probably initially celebrated as a commemoration of the foundation of Constantinople (next to the „actual“ birthday of the capital on 11th May). The proof of this – aside from other arguments – is the mention by John the Lydian, who in *De mensibus* tells us twice the story of the foundation of Rome: first time on 21st April, the traditional date of the birthday of Rome, and for the second time he starts the story of Romulus and Remus precisely on 8th November. We do not know, how the retold story ends, because the only existing manuscript has a lacuna. We see however, that November 8th was for John the Lydian a date symmetric to the birthday of Rome and probably a civic holiday. This holiday at some point lost its civic character and turned into the liturgical remembrance of St Michael.

Let us now examine the basic text describing the demarcation of Constantinople, as related by Philostorgius. According to Philostorgius Constantine carried out the act of *limitatio* with a spear in his hand. The companions of the emperor were alarmed, that it measured too large an area and asked how much further he intended to go. Constantine replied: „as long as the one who walks in

front of me orders me to stop ". Philostorgius comments: it is clear to see that in front of Constantine was walking some δύναμις οὐρανία (heavenly power – it is a term used to describe angels), or in another version just ἄγγελος, instructing him as to what he should do. The tenth century *Patria* shows us in this scene an angel who demarks the place where an emperor should stop by placing a sword in the ground. This seems to be an identification of our figure as St Michael. The development of a story of the drawing of the borders of Constantinople, first noted by Philostorgius, allows us to seek in it a sign of conviction that it took place with the participation of angelic powers.

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The matter becomes more intriguing, when we consider the role played by St Michael in Christian thought in the first centuries and in the religious policy of Constantine.

Let us examine one of the focal points of the most important theological debate for the time of Constantine, the discussion about the nature of Christ. Among theologians there prevailed a general agreement that Christ revealed himself to the people before his incarnation and the pre-Nice church fathers pointed out in their writings scenes from the Old Testament, in which such manifestations would occur. Chronologically, the first one was the visit of the three guests to Abraham, under the oak in Mamre (Genesis 18), and after that there followed many others, for example, Jacob's struggle with the angel, the burning bush, the pillar of fire leading the Israelites out of the desert, etc. The identification of these scenes alone, however, gave no answer to the question, as to as whom Christ was revealed in these scenes. The general description of pre-incarnated Christ as Logos (the Word), which has its roots in the Jewish tradition, and is additionally derived from the Gospel of St John (J 1, 1–14), has not concluded the matter. In the Old Testament forms considered to be the manifestation of Logos are referred to in several places as angels. In addition, in the Book of Isaiah one of the names given to Emmanuel is „Angel of Great Counsel" (Isaiah 9,5). From this also came the idea of identifying Logos with the angel, or rather the first among the angels, that is the Archangel Michael, known as the Arch-strategist.

If we now turn our attention to the scene at Mamre: in various texts from the early centuries, created in a Judeo-Christian circles we find different interpretations of the scene at Mamre. We hear that the guests of Abraham were three angels: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, of which Michael was the first, or that it was Christ (of course pre-incarnated, the Logos) and two companions- angels. This shows the closeness (and mutual substitutability) of the forms of Christ and Michael in this scene.

This substitution is also evident in the way in which the early Christian sources describe the place of the Palestinian cult at Mamre. In the most important evidence for us, from a letter of

Constantine himself, the emperor addresses the bishops „You know, after all, that the first time God – the Lord of the Universe, revealed himself to Abraham he spoke with him exactly in this place. It was there that began the first observance of God’s law; it was there for the first time the Savior himself, with two angels, honored Abraham with the manifestation of his presence. There for the first time God revealed himself to the people.”⁵ Also Eusebius and after him Sozomenos write, that it was in Mamre that the pre-incarnated Christ, the Logos, revealed himself to Abraham. On the other hand, in 333, the Pilgrim of Bordeaux called the guests of Abraham „three angels”, as over 100 years later so did Socrates Scholasticus. Within the same early Christian tradition, therefore, can be seen the fluency of the interpretation of the scene at Mamre and the ease of transition between the form of Logos and the angel. Also the descriptions of the cult place in Mamre by Sozomen and the Jewish “Testament of Abraham” from the first century demonstrate, that in late antiquity Mamre was a focal point for various overlapping and mutually interacting cults: angels, Michael and pre-incarnated Christ.

Christian writers, at least those, of whom we would say today were „in the mainstream of theological thought” never considered Christ/Logos and Michael to be equal. However, the close relationship of these two figures reveals itself in many places. On one hand, in the early centuries of Christianity there existed a strong and recurring tradition concerning the angelic nature of Christ, of which the strong foundations were created by Justin. On the other hand influential Jewish philosophy and rabbinical tradition underlined the role of Michael as the Old Testament figure in places where Christian authors were more likely to see Logos. At the same time authors „on the outskirts of orthodoxy” boldly pointed out links between Christ and Michael. Finally the close relationship between the two figures can be seen in the descriptive terms which the Christian authors use when describing Logos such as „Supreme Commander of the Heavenly Host” and „High Priest”.

It seems that the relationship between Christ/Logos and Michael was present to such an extent in theological thought of the first centuries, that it could have easily influenced Constantine’s, and indeed his environment’s, view of Christ. In fact, we find traces of such a close relationship among the authors closest to Constantine: the angelic nature of Christ is quite clearly suggested in Lactantius’ *De Institutiones*, and Eusebius in 335 boldly describes Logos as „Arch-strategist” and „Angel of the Great Counsel”. The most complete commentary on the theme of Logos is Eusebius’ tract *Peri theophaneias*, preserved only in Syriac, created in 324 as „the final word” of the author on

⁵ *Vita Constantini* III,53. οὐ γὰρ ἀγνοεῖτε ἐκεῖ πρῶτον τὸν τῶν ὅλων δεσπότην θεὸν καὶ ὤφθαι τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ διειλέχθαι. ἐκεῖ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον ἢ τοῦ ἁγίου νόμου θρησκεία τὴν καταρχὴν εἴληφεν, ἐκεῖ πρῶτον ὁ σωτὴρ αὐτὸς μετὰ τῶν δύο ἀγγέλων τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιφάνειαν τῷ Ἀβραάμ ἐπεδαψιλεύσατο, ἐκεῖ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ὁ θεὸς ἤρξατο φαίνεσθαι.

theological matters. We find there a claim about the identity of Logos as the „first angel” and information that in ancient times Logos appeared to the people in the form of an angel.

Let’s now move on to Constantine: Eusebius informed us of the foundation of churches following the defeat of Licinius (and, as suggested by Eusebius, in gratitude for it): among them is the Church of the Redeemer in Nicomedia and churches in provincial capitals, of which the temple at Antioch Eusebius describes in slightly greater detail. However, the most attention has been devoted to a completely different foundation: the emperor notably ordered construction of a church in Mamre. It is interesting, that the church at Mamre is the only foundation of Constantine associated with the cult of the Old Testament, and its foundation was placed by Eusebius in an entirely different context (and is located in a different part of the work) than other churches founded in the Holy Land. As regards the chronology, we know that this foundation was conceived sometime between 325 and 327.

As Eusebius wrote, Constantine learned that „the same Savior, who recently appeared on earth, has in ancient times appeared to the god-fearing men of Palestine near the oak in Mamre.”⁶ Eusebius then cites a letter of Constantine to the bishops of Palestine, which explains the motives and circumstances of the foundation: the emperor learned from his mother-in-law’s Eutropia’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land of pagan practices taking place in Mamre. He was so outraged by the news that he ordered the destruction of all the idols worshiped there and the building of a church. The church was already completed in 333, when the site was visited by the Pilgrim of Bordeaux. Constantine’s foundation was confirmed in later comprehensive works, and also by Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen.

In light of the words of Constantine just outlined it seems almost certain that the interest of the emperor in Mamre, his concern for the removal of pagan cults, and his stress on the importance of this place in the letter to the Palestinian bishops stemmed directly from an interest in the question of the apparition of a pre-incarnated Christ. Of course, information about Mamre and the pagan practices that were probably held there came to him via Eutropia, but obviously fell on very fertile ground, seeing as Constantine decided to build a church there, and in addition, as suggested by Eusebius, giving it a votive character. In my opinion we should allow for the possibility, that this interest had to do with the fact that Constantine attributed his victory over Licinius to the help of pre-incarnated Christ in the form of an angelic Michael.

⁶ Ibidem. πυθόμενος [δέ] τοι ἓνα καὶ τὸ αὐτὸν σωτῆρα τὸν {τε} ἑναγχοῦς ἐπιφανέντα τῷ βίῳ καὶ πρόπαλαι θεοφανείας πεποιῆσθαι φιλοθέοις ἀνδράσι τῆς Παλαιστίνης ἀμφὶ τὴν καλουμένην δρυῖν Μαμβρῇ (...).

Let's summarize the historical part of the argument so far: Constantine wanted to present his victory over Licinius as similar to the victory of St Michael over the dragon. The ways he expressed this included commissioning of a painting, where he is depicted in a pose reminiscent of St Michael, and minting a coin, which contains the detail of a lance topped with the chi-ro piercing a serpent. It is possible that his conviction was due to some extraordinary events (visions of an angel?) which happened in Sosthenion. Immediately after the victory, Constantine founded a new city on the day which in later tradition was the most important celebration of St Michael, and, near the city, it seems, in the place of his vision, built a church dedicated to St Michael. At the same time he strongly insisted on eliminating the pagan cults around the most famous Old Testament place of the apparition of Logos-Michael and building there a church.

In the city founded in such circumstances the cult of St Michael should be very clearly visible. Equally visible should be the link between the Archangel and the imperial authority. Indeed, it is easy to confirm this assumption. In Constantinople we find (throughout its history) about twenty different churches of St Michael, of which a few have quite ancient origins. The significance of the cult of Michael in the imperial capital is also evident in numerous references to the Archangel in every register of Constantinople's reality and indeed this is the case up until the very end of the empire. We can also point to the role of St Michael as a patron of the emperors, especially those who proclaimed themselves the „new Constantine“, like Justinian, Basil I and Michael Palaiologos.

It seems however, that the last bit of the picture should be some central foundation dedicated to Michael in Constantinople, which combined the cult of the Archangel with the place in which to demonstrate the power of Constantine (or more broadly, the emperors). In searching for such a foundation we come across an extremely intriguing, even though late, post-iconoclastic testimony of the cult of St Michael in the most important temple of the capital, Hagia Sofia. The matter is, in my opinion, worth investigating. Let's collate available information.

One should begin again from theological issues. To the analogy of Archangel Michael-Logos we should add a third aspect, Sophia (God's Wisdom). Association of Logos and Sophia is based in Christian thought on placing together the Gospel of St. John (*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* J 1, 1) with the Book of Proverbs in which Sophia says *The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be* (Proverbs 8, 22 – 23). However, this identification has a much longer tradition, originating in the Book of Wisdom from which it was taken by Philo of Alexandria. We can also find it at Origen. Of particular importance for us is the fact that the issue of the identity of Sophia and Logos appeared already at the Council of Nice in 325, not

awakening the protest of neither Arius nor his polemicists, and the Council itself confirmed this identity. In Eusebius' *Peri thophaneias* Logos and Sophia are constantly identified with each other. And indeed, historians researching the dedication of Hagia Sophia always note the reference to Christ (though it is not always emphasized that it is a pre-incarnated Christ).

Pre-incarnated Christ is thus both the Arch-strategist Michael and the Wisdom of God. It is not surprising therefore, that the figures of Sophia and Michael also appear to be related to one another. For example, in the Book of Wisdom, the appearances of the Angel of the Lord familiar from the books of the Old Testament, are presented as the appearance of Sophia. Also the iconography of Sophia points to her relationship with the Archangel.

The figure of Solomon deserves slightly more attention, as he proves to be a link connecting all the pieces of the puzzle, and introduces another additional one, the Temple of Jerusalem. It was Solomon who was to be the author of the Book of Wisdom, in which we find equation of Logos and Sophia, as well as material to equate Sophia with Michael. It is here, and also in the Book of Proverbs attributed to Solomon, that we find an association of Solomon's Jerusalem temple with wisdom. Solomon also appears to be the link between the Jerusalem temple and St Michael. According to the apocryphal third century „Testament of Solomon“, a text very popular both with Jews and Christians, St Michael gave Solomon a ring, by which Solomon was able to subdue demons who were preventing the completion of the Jerusalem temple. Solomon also appears in many sources connected to the Hagia Sophia: for example, according to tradition, Justinian exclaimed after completing the Hagia Sophia: „Solomon, I beat you!“, and a statue of Solomon was supposed to have stood in front of the Hagia Sophia watching over the temple, which surpassed Jerusalem.

So let us examine the sources directly connecting the Hagia Sophia to St Michael. Many sources mention the Archangel's patronage on the church. *Diegesis* (Description) of Hagia Sophia, from the ninth century, although recording undoubtable earlier tradition, presents the matter in a very interesting way: during construction of the (Justinian) temple workers took a break from their work, leaving the architect's son as a guard. When he was alone in the church, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him, declaring that he can leave, as now he was the guardian of the temple. He ordered him also to tell Justinian to quickly finish construction. The exact words of the angel were: „In the name of the Holy Wisdom, or Logos God, that which is just built will not disappear from here, for this is the place, that Logos God has shown for my service and [given under] my care.“⁷ Influenced by this statement, Justinian decided to name his foundation the church of Holy Wisdom, or Logos God. Late-medieval pilgrims, retelling the story, had no trouble identifying the figure of the angel with the

⁷ *Diegesis*... 10:.. Μὰ τὴν ἁγίαν Σοφίαν, ἣτις ἐστὶν ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν κτιζομένην, οὐκ ὑποχωρῶ ἀπὸ ὧδε· ἐνταῦθα γὰρ ἐτάχθην δουλεύειν καὶ φυλάττειν παρὰ τοῦ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἕως ὅτου ὑποστρέψῃς.

Archangel Michael. The Angel of the Lord appears in the text of *Diegesis* twice more: he reveals the plan of the temple to the emperor and provides resources for the construction of the dome. *Diegesis* shows us therefore the consistency of the ideas connecting at once Sophia, Logos, angels (Michael) and the church of Hagia Sofia. To this set can be added still Solomon's temple, and indeed the story of the boy, son of an architect, an angel and an emperor shows narrative similarities to the story of the building of the temple of Solomon in the „Testament of Solomon“. What is more the „plan of the temple“ (σχεῖμα), which the angel shows to Justinian, refers to the heavenly temple from the Book of Ezekiel which was a template/plan of the Jerusalem temple: this temple was shown to Ezekiel in the Bible by an angel.

St Michael appears as the guardian of Hagia Sofia numerous times in later testimonies: in twelfth century Niketas Choniates refers to Michael in this way, while Arab geographer al-Damashqi describes as being placed in Constantinople a „Great Church, where, as they say, an angel lives“. The figure of Michael appears repeatedly in connection to Hagia Sofia also in medieval apocalyptical writings, predicting the end of Constantinople.

Let us now turn our attention to another important church, that is Nea Megale Ekklesia, erected in 880 by emperor Basil I, the founder of the Macedonian dynasty and one of Byzantium's „new Constantines“. This church was to be in all probability „the new Hagia Sophia“, while the patrons were Christ, the Virgin Mary, Elias, Nicholas and Michael. The Virgin Mary as the city's patron and Elias as the patron of the dynasty (and personally of Basil) are the obvious choices. Questions arise about Nicholas and Michael, and particularly the later. Basil after all reached power after having killed his predecessor Michael III and historians have wondered why he would devote a church to an Archangel bearing the name of his recent victim. According to the most commonly accepted explanation the initial patron was in fact Archangel Gabriel, while the name of Michael appeared when Basil or his son made an act of atonement for Basil's deeds. There is no clarity in this matter as Basil founded or restored in Constantinople a few other churches of St Michael and the association between Nea and St Michael turned out to be extremely strong: in the tenth century Liutprand of Cremona, and after him two pilgrim's testimonies from the eleventh and twelfth centuries speak of it simply as a church of St Michael. We have grounds to suspect the cult of Michael was copied by Basil from Hagia Sofia (similarly to other symbolic associations such as the „temple of Solomon“).

In this regard particularly noteworthy are the relics located in the Hagia Sofia. *Diegesis* describes that in a chapel of the Holy Well, located in an extension of the right aisle of the church, were found the trumpets of Jericho, which is confirmed later in virtually all extensive reports of pilgrims. In the same church, but directly beside the chapel was kept the table of Abraham, at which he entertained guests at Mamre. Those relics are not just simply relics of the Old Testament, as

previously interpreted, but specifically relics associated with St Michael. The importance of the scene in Mamre has been already mentioned, while the trumpets relate to the biblical description of how Joshua gained Jericho (Jos, 5, 13-15). Before the attack the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joshua and commanded him to blow the trumpets in order to capture the city. The scene is also one of the few included in early Christian tradition with the apparition of Michael-Christ. It was in this scene that the only reference in the Bible to the „Archstrategist“ occurs.

The matter becomes clear if we look at the collection of relics of the Nea Ekklesia. In the reports of pilgrims we find three interesting relics: the trumpet of Jericho, Abraham's table from Mamre and also Abraham's ram horn. Let me recall, that the patriarch sacrificed a ram instead of Isaac, when the Angel of the Lord stopped him from killing his son (Gen 22, 11 - 19). The trumpet and horn were stored in Nea beside the altar (or even in the altar – this is not clear), and the table of Abraham in a side chapel. There is little doubt that this must be the chapel of St Michael, which Constantine Porphyrogenitus mentions in the 10th century work *De Ceremoniis*. Two out of three of the relics, as we have seen, are identical to the relics stored in Hagia Sofia, which cannot be a coincidence. As regards the chronology, it is almost certain that the set from Hagia Sofia was first, and the set from Nea had to repeat it: in any case, the existence of the trumpet of Jericho is testified in Hagia Sofia before the construction of Nea. In all likelihood it was Basil I, in founding Nea, who moved from Hagia Sofia the set of relics of St Michael, supplemented perhaps by an additional acquisition (Abraham's ram horn) – we know after all that he tried to equip his church with the relics of its patron (he attempted, for example, unsuccessfully to remove from Myra the relics of St Nicholas).

If you look at the topography of medieval Hagia Sofia, we can find St Michael in two other places apart from the chapel of the Holy Well. *Diegesis* locates the appearance of the angel to the son of the architect with great precision at „the second pillar on the south side“, which later communications also repeat. It seems that this location could have been inspired by a representation of the Angel of the Lord (St Michael) situated just in this place. In addition, we learn both from pilgrims and the twelfth century chronicler Nicephorus Choniates that a mosaic depicting St Michael with a sword was found at the entrance to „pronaos St Michael“, in the south-west side of the church. The places associated with Michael are therefore restricted to the south (right) nave of Hagia Sophia.

At this point, two observations. First, the arrangement of the relics in Hagia Sofia suggests a very deliberate division of the church - the south, dedicated to pre-incarnated Christ/St Michael, and the north, dedicated to Christ incarnated: in Holy Week the relics of the Passion of Christ were exhibited here (for the remainder of the year they were kept in another church), here also was to be found an image of Christ, from whose wound flowed water to heal the sick, an icon representing

women going to the tomb, and in a separate chapel the shackles of St Peter. The link between them were relics of the Incarnation, namely the swaddling cloths of Jesus, which according to Constantine Porphyrogenitus were stored at the altar of Hagia Sophia and which emperors would kiss during certain festivals. It seems that the originator of the idea of „supplementing” the initial cult of pre-incarnated Christ with the memory of Incarnation (and in consequence – the incarnated Christ) could have been Justinian who dedicated the church he built on Christmas 537. It seems that Justinian used this date to toy with the dedication of the church, here thanks to his foundation: “Word (Logos) became flesh”.

Secondly, the part of the Hagia Sofia dedicated to pre-incarnated Christ coincides exactly with the „imperial” area of the church. The chapel of the holy wells plays a significant role in imperial ceremonies: one of the routes passing between the palace and the Hagia Sofia led directly through this chapel. This is where the emperors, upon entering the church, took off their diadem, and assumed it again when leaving the chapel. A tenth century tradition places there a relic of the „throne of Constantine the Great”. At the beginning of the fourteenth century Nikephoros Callistos provides an interesting scene of the coronation of Constantine the Great, which took place in the south-eastern part of Hagia Sophia, partly in the chapel of the Holy Well and adjacent chapels.

The central regal place within „the zone of St Michael” was *metatorion* located in the immediate proximity of the relic of Abraham’s table and the icon depicting three angels. It was a separate place where during service the emperor stayed, and where the throne was located on which the emperors sat holding scepter. It was the private space of the emperor that the ruler left to take part in key moments of the ceremony. In the tenth century *metatorion* constituted a type of mini-palace inside Hagia Sofia and included two floors of the church. Similarly to a box in the hippodrome *metatrion* – while being a private space (the emperor took his meals there for example) – also constituted a regal space. This can be seen in the role which it played in the ninth and tenth centuries during coronations: after the patriarch crowned the emperor by the altar the emperor moved to *metatorion* and sat on the throne where officials made a tribute to him by prostrating themselves and kissing his knees. It was in *metatorion* therefore where the final key accord of the coronation rite took place.

Let us return for a moment to the issues associated with the holiday on 8th November. In the tenth century *De caeremoniis*, emperors celebrated the day in Nea Ekklesia, a chapel dedicated to Archstrategist (and so almost certainly that in which stood the table of Abraham). We can in all likelihood assume that before the inauguration of Nea the celebrations took place in Hagia Sofia, most likely also in the chapel dedicated to Michael, that is, we can assume, in the chapel of the holy well, which contained also the relic of the table of Abraham.

The association of St Michael with the Hagia Sofia appears to us so far almost exclusively in late posticonoclastic material. The actions of Basil I during the foundation of Nea Ekklesia: the change of the church's dedication, the set of relics linked with the cult of St Michael and – perhaps – a holiday on 8th November, gives the impression that in the second half of the ninth century the figure of the first Archangel appeared to be closely related to the Hagia Sophia and the personage of the ruler. The testimonies in our possession, give only an impression, unclear to today's audience, of symbolic system linking the most important temple of Constantinople with the beginning of the city, cult of the Archangel and the personage of the emperor. How far back can we trace this system?

In my opinion, the early dating of the regal-angel layout of Hagia Sophia is most strongly indicated by the etymology of the word *metatorion* (μητατώριον), used – in the form μιτατώριον – for the first time in reference to the second, Theodosian Hagia Sofia. All subsequent examples of the word *metatorion* come from the ninth and tenth centuries. *Metatorion* is usually derived from the Latin *mutatorium* (changing room). This etymology is undoubtedly correct in relation to the various rooms, defined by the same name, in which the emperor took off or assumed the crown (or robes), before entering additional chambers. However, the proper *metatorion* in any case did not precisely serve this purpose, but was, as mentioned, a kind of emperor's box and place of power.

Let us look at another Latin word, *metator*. It means a surveyor, someone who outlines the position of buildings, military camps, towns, etc. When we examine the Book of Ezekiel (Ez 40 – 47), we come across the figure of an angel-guide, who during a long vision shows the prophet the heavenly temple of Jerusalem, on which the temple on earth should be modeled upon. The figure is presented as „a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand” (Ez 40, 3). This image appears again in the Book of Ezekiel and twice in Zechariah; in Revelations an angel orders John to measure the temple (Rev 1, 1), while in a further part of the vision one of the angels measures with a golden cane Jerusalem of the Messianic times (Rev 21, 15). We can see, that in the Bible there is a strongly visible relationship between the reconstruction of the temple of Jerusalem, which has blueprints of heavenly origin, and the Angel of the Lord-surveyor, although the term „surveyor” is not present in the Bible.

The ninth century *Life of Constantine*, which is in large part a copy of the fifth century text of Philostorgius notes that an angel stepping in front of Constantine during the demarcation of the borders of Constantinople, oversaw the activity of surveying (τὰ μέτρα), carried out by the emperor in a manner similar to the demarcation of Jerusalem (as we understand, heavenly). In the ninth century *Diegesis* we read that the emperor Justinian „charted a plan” of Hagia Sofia, revealed to him by an angel. The word καταμετρέω is used, which means „measure down”, „construct borders according to what is above” – that is, according to the plan disclosed by the angel. Belonging to this same family is the word μετρητής which is the Greek equivalent of *metator*.

If we go back even further, we find the word *metator* in a very interesting passage from Lactantius: in *De Institutiones* he says that in Old Testament times God wanted to send to earth *metatorem templi sui*, which was not accomplished through the misdeeds of the Jews. And so in the fourth century, pre-incarnated Christ was referred to as „the surveyor of the temple“. Researchers have also pointed out that surveyor is a term used for Logos by Philo of Alexandria. From the reports of Philogorstius and *Diegesis* we see that the equivalent of the heavenly surveyor could be the emperor – surveying the city or earthly temple. The word *metatorium* should mean „a place intended for *metator*“, „the seat of *metator*“, just like, for example *praetorium* is the seat of the *pretor*. As John the Lydian noted, the word *metator* is given in Greek as μητάτωρ, and so the Greek equivalent of *metatorium* is μητατώριον. In my opinion, when the expression *metatorion* ceased to be understood, the distinction was blurred between the expression and the term *mutatorion* and as a result this first name was from then on used to describe the emperor’s box and numerous changing rooms.

Even the Latin origin of the word points to an earlier origin of *metatorion*. However it is Lactantius who takes us directly to Constantine the Great: he was after all the preceptor of his son Crispus. Even without insisting on personal involvement of the ruler in the naming of *metatorion* (after all we don’t even know if it was him who erected Hagia Sofia), we should consider what role was initially played by *metatorion*. In my view, we can tentatively assert that it was a place devoted to the builder of the city and the temple: in heaven this was the Angel of the Lord/St Michael/Christ-Logos/Sophia and on earth this was the emperor. The location in this place of the imperial box indicates that the ruler was to rule there together with Christ-Logos (in his angel form), with whom and for whom the city was founded and the temple established.

4

Even if only part of my assumptions are correct, it still raises the question, how was it possible for Constantine to deliberately start the imperial-religious connections to St Michel? Where did he draw inspiration from? It is difficult to suspect that the emperor was theologically sophisticated, but no doubt he was an extremely efficient ideologue. We should therefore point out that the various ideas discussed here were part of the political and religious discourse in the time of Constantine. Let us look therefore at how the Christian sources interpreted ten years before the founding of Constantinople the triumph of faith over paganism, that is the victory of Constantine over Maxentius and Licinius over Maximinus Daia as well as the so-called tolerance edict issued later by the emperors. We lean in this place on sources which were created before the outbreak of conflict between Constantine and Licinius, because later texts out of necessity change the original

understanding of these events. Two texts are instructive here, all the more because they were written someone at least indirectly related to the imperial court: *De mortibus persecutorum* by Lactantius and a speech of Eusebius, that he delivered upon the inauguration of the church in Tyre, probably in 315.

In chapter 43 – 49 of *De mortibus persecutorum* Lactantius describes the victory of the Christian emperors Constantine and Licinius over Maxentius and Maximinus Daia respectively. These descriptions are in many respects consistent – there are many similarities, but we shall note the most significant. Before the battle at Milvian Bridge, Maxentius consulted an oracle, and Constantine in a dream received an order to mark the shields of his soldiers with a Christogram. On the day of quinquennalia of his opponent, Constantine defeated Maxentius with the help of the divine. The following year in the east Maximinus swore an oath to Jupiter that if he won he would wipe the Christians from the earth. To Licinius appeared an Angel of the Lord, which taught him how to pray to God. On a day before the eighth anniversary of the elevation of Maximinus, Licinius' soldiers recited a prayer dictated by the angel and with God's help they gained victory over Maximinus' army. After the triumph Licinius (as is claimed, through consultation with Constantine) granted an edict introducing freedom of worship for Christians. In the final chapters of his work Lactantius describes the death of the surviving enemies of Christianity, after this he summarizes the events that he wrote about: God wiped from the face of the earth his enemies, thus the empire and the church were at peace.

Licinius is presented in this image as the great conqueror of the pagans, enjoying the special care of God. Lactantius dedicates more space to his victory than the victory of Constantine. Much more extensive is also the vision of Licinius before the battle. The clash between Constantine and Maxentius seemed to be only a prelude to the principal struggle where faith would triumph over paganism, that is the battle between Licinius and Maximinus Daia. It was in the end the victory of Licinius that allowed Christians the freedom of worship.

This image is further developed in a very interesting way by Eusebius. According to the words of the author it was to illustrate how after the great victory of the Christian emperors over the enemy of faith, peace ruled over the empire and there could be built new churches. There is a lack of historical details, but we find an excellent religious interpretation of political events that happened two-three years earlier. Eusebius writes first about the persecution: the light of Christ, which appeared in the world, enraged „the jealous, who hates what is good, and the Demon, who loves that which is evil”⁸, who began to destroy the Christian churches. „Next came shrill whistles and the hissing of snakes, then the threats of ungodly tyrants, then again the blasphemous regulations of

⁸ *Historia Ecclesiastica* 10,4,14. τοῦ μισοκάλου φθόνου καὶ φιλοπονήρου δαίμονος.

wicked rulers. Then he breathed his deadly poison, souls captured by him he poisoned with a venom horrific and deadly (...)”⁹. The godless rulers were therefore portrayed as the tool of Satan, in the form of a dragon-serpent.

Reading further: „Then anew the Angel of Great Counsel, the Great Archstrategist of God appeared suddenly (...) His enemies and foes he wiped out and destroyed so completely that it seemed as if their name never existed. His friends and members of his household he elevated to the highest glory (...)”¹⁰. Against the dragon stand and fight defenders of the faith, led by Christ as „the Angel of Great Council and God’s Archstrategist” (ὁ τῆς μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελος, ὁ μέγας ἀρχιστράτηγος τοῦ θεοῦ). There are no terms that would indicate in a clearer way that we are dealing with an image of Christ-Michael. As early as 315 the victory of Christianity over paganism was described in terms which highlighted the help of pre-incarnated Christ. We can assume that this kind of rhetoric has a close connection with the vision of Licinius, and that it is exactly this vision that dominated early Christian interpretations of events in 312 and 313.

At the moment of conflict between former allies, leading to the eventual victory of Constantine over Licinius, this picture had to be reassessed. Now it was Licinius who was presented as a pagan and the enemy of Christians, while Constantine, along with the eastern Christian authors from whom we derive this knowledge, tried to prove that he enjoyed the care of the Christian God. Already in *History of the Church* by Eusebius, written around 326, a change occurs in the presentation of various events: Constantine’s vision of 312 is developed, and the vision of Licinius is lost from the narrative. However also the current victory had to be given due weight and an appropriate interpretation. Constantine, it seems, wanted to point out that Licinius, a former ward of Christ-Michael, stood now aligned with Satan, and that it was Constantine who now enjoyed the special care of the Archangel. I think that Constantine turned here to a tried and tested methods, that is, he announced that now appeared to him the Angel of the Lord, predicting victory over the enemy, and at the same time stated, that Licinius sought the help of pagan gods. An extra dimension is added by the fact that both victories: Licinius over Maximinus Daia and eleven years later Constantine over Licinius took place in almost exactly the same spot: the area of Adrianople and Byzantium. In this light the new urban foundation, which in 324 was certainly the symbolic culmination of the great victory, turns out to be also a kind of votive offering established in the place of a great victory of Christ-Michael over Satan.

⁹ Ibidem. εἴτα δὲ δεινὰ συρίγματα καὶ τὰς ὀφιώδεις αὐτοῦ φωνὰς τοτὲ μὲν ἀσεβῶν τυράννων ἀπειλαῖς, τοτὲ δὲ βλασφήμοις δυσσεβῶν ἀρχόντων διατάξουσιν ἀφιέντος καὶ προσέτι τὸν αὐτοῦ θάνατον ἐξερευγομένου.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4,4,15-20. αὐθις ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς ὁ τῆς μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελος, ὁ μέγας ἀρχιστράτηγος τοῦ θεοῦ, μετὰ τὴν αὐτάρκη διαγυμνασίαν ἣν οἱ μέγιστοι τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας στρατιῶται διὰ τῆς πρὸς ἅπαντα ὑπομονῆς καὶ καρτερίας ἐνεδείξαντο, ἀθρόως οὕτως φανείς, τὰ μὲν ἐχθρὰ καὶ πολέμια εἰς ἀφανὲς καὶ τὸ μηθὲν κατεστήσατο, ὥς μηδὲ πώποτε ὠνομάσθαι δοκεῖν, τὰ δὲ αὐτῷ φίλα καὶ οἰκεῖα δόξης ἐπέκεινα παρὰ πᾶσιν (...).